

The Crucible, Act II by Arthur Miller
Reading Warm-up B

Read the following passage. Pay special attention to the underlined words. Then, read it again, and complete the activities. Use a separate sheet of paper for your written answers.

Soon after World War II, two plays swiftly established Arthur Miller as a major new talent in the American theater. The first was *All My Sons* (1947), a drama about a prosperous businessman with a weighty secret that amounts to a burden on his conscience. As the head of an airplane-parts company, Keller has approved the decision to ship out defective equipment. The defective parts led to the deaths of many wartime pilots. Confronted by authorities later, he refuses to flinch or confess to his crime. Instead, he evasively covers up the truth, insisting that he had no part in the matter. Keller's wily strategy fails in the end, however. He is unmasked as a man in whom morality has yielded to greed and ambition for his family.

Miller's second important play of this period was *Death of a Salesman* (1949). Few people today would begrudge this drama the status of an American classic. The play is the story of an aging salesman, Willy Loman, who is flailing in anguish to reconcile his dreams of material success with the reality of failure in his life. Willy has cherished an image of himself as a mover and shaker in his profession. The play, however, shows that he has performed ineptly—a sad victim of his own pretensions and his distortion of the American dream. In the end, we recognize the main character as more of a victim than a hero. After the play's opening night, critics reacted not only civilly but enthusiastically with their reviews, hailing Miller as a sensation, and later that year, the playwright won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama.

1. Underline the words that give a clue to the meaning of weighty. Write a sentence using the word **weighty**.
2. Circle the words in this sentence that give a clue to the meaning of flinch. What are two synonyms for **flinch**?
3. Underline the words in this and the previous sentence that hint at the meaning of evasively. Use a word meaning the opposite of **evasively** in a sentence.
4. Underline the words in this sentence and the next sentence that give a clue to the meaning of wily. What are two synonyms for **wily**?
5. Circle the words in this sentence that give a clue to the meaning of begrudge. What do you feel when you do the opposite of **begrudge**?
6. Underline the words in this sentence that hint at the meaning of flailing.
7. Circle the words that hint at the meaning of ineptly. Use a word meaning the opposite of **ineptly** in a sentence.
8. Circle the words in this sentence that hint at the meaning of the word civilly. What is a synonym for **civilly**? What is an antonym for this word?